

The Dallas Post

SportsWeek

From the pressbox

by Dave Konopki

Gibby Gibbon left his mark on local baseball

The players have reported to spring training. The exhibition games have begun. Locally, the start of the Little League season is right around the corner.

But baseball won't be the same this season. At least not in our little part of the world.

The local sports scene, especially the sport of baseball, lost one of its true ambassadors last week with the passing of Bob "Gibby" Gibbon. Gibby suffered a massive heart attack and died at the tender age of 54.

Gibby was a longtime volunteer of Little League, teen and American Legion baseball in the Wilkes-Barre area. In many ways, Gibby was Wilkes-Barre baseball.

This column usually deals with sports, specifically those in the Back Mountain. But Gibby touched the lives of people far outside the boundaries of Wilkes-Barre.

Mine was one of them.

I first met Gibby when I was a sportswriter with the Citizens' Voice. Over the years we got to know each other and I quickly realized the bond between himself and the young people of the Wyoming Valley.

Gibby never married, never had any children. But he had hundreds, maybe thousands, of "adopted" sons. Gibby always put the welfare of the kids first, even if it meant personal sacrifice.

I never heard Bob Gibbon utter a bad word about anyone. If he felt that way in his heart, he never expressed it publicly. Gibby epitomized the phrase, "class individual." Many people believe that, without Gibby, American Legion baseball in Wilkes-Barre would have ended years ago. Let's hope someone picks up the baton he carried for so long.

I last spoke with Gibby at the Lake-Lehman/Meyers basketball playoff game less than 48 hours before his death. We talked about - what else? - baseball. About my Little League team. About American Legion baseball. About baseball in general. He smiled as he talked. I smiled as I listened.

I'll carry that smile for the rest of my life.

I've always been an avid believer in sports. A believer in the way sports, if used correctly, can mold the character of a young man or woman. Sports has been a major factor in my life since I was six years old and will continue to be that way until I depart this earth.

But sports must also be placed in its proper perspective in life. I have to admit that, like many of us, I sometimes take life for granted. As a sportswriter, and coach, I am constantly surrounded by children and young adults in excellent health.

There are those, however, who aren't as fortunate.

My wife and I recently found out that our four-year old son, Ryan, would have to undergo heart surgery at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia.

My immediate concerns were for Ryan's health, both now and for the future. But after getting the doctor's assurances that the problem and surgery were not immediately life-threatening, I silently wondered how this may affect his ability to play sports if he chooses to do so in the future.

But while I was sitting in the waiting room of the Intensive Care Unit, I began to have conversations with other parents of children with health problems. Serious health problems. Brain surgery, fractured skulls, cancer, heart disease.

There was no talk of sports. No conversations about Little League, youth basketball, soccer or mini-football. These kids were fighting to play in the biggest game of all - the game of life.

So, the next time your son or daughter strikes out, the next time they miss that all-important shot on the free-throw line, the next time your child fails to live up to your expectations, hug them. Hold them close and tell them how much you love them and how happy you are that they are there with you.

It's much easier to do it there than in the intensive care unit.

A special thank you to everyone who sent cards, gifts and their prayers while Ryan was in the hospital. He is getting better with each day and his problem has been permanently corrected. A special thank you to president Larry Lettie and Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. for the gift and support. Also, to head coach Paul Brown, assistant coach Joe Ellis and the Dallas High School basketball team who presented Ryan with an autographed basketball. Words cannot express my feelings of gratitude.

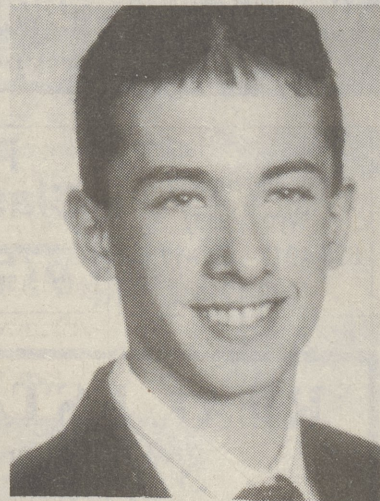
Samuel will attend Pitt

Award-winning Dallas High School distance runner Matt Samuel will be taking his talent to the University of Pittsburgh in the fall. Samuel, who was a first-team all-state cross country runner and a first-team All-American at the Junior A.A.U. national championships in 1992, also considered Syracuse, West Virginia and Shippensburg before choosing Pitt for his college career.

The Dallas senior began running in the sixth grade and has followed in the footsteps of his father, who ran at Juniata College and older brother, Jared, who was on the squad at the University of Delaware.

Academics and coaching style were the determining factors in his choice, which came down to Shippensburg and Pitt at the end. "It was mainly academics," Samuel said. "And I like the team. The coaching philosophy is similar to Dallas." He said Pitt's coach doesn't believe in overtraining, and emphasized that he would help Samuel in the transition from high school to college.

Samuel expects to compete in cross-country and track, running



MATT SAMUEL

the longer distances in both the indoor and outdoor track seasons. In cross country, he'll have to adjust to the five to six mile college distance after competing on three mile high school courses.

During his years at Dallas, Samuel held the district Junior High record at 3,200 meters, won the 3,200 meter district title in 1992 and was a four-time state qualifier for the boys' cross country championships. He also won the 1992 district cross country championship and the Cliff Roberts cross country championship.

Matt is the son of Earl and Pam Samuel of Demunds Corners in Dallas.

10 local wrestlers going to regionals

By DAVE KONOPKI Sports Correspondent

If you had sat down with Tom Williams and Steve Kaschenbach last December and predicted their respective team's success in last week's District 2 Class AA wrestling championships, they probably would have laughed in disbelief.

But the success attained by the Lake-Lehman and Dallas matmen was no laughing matter.

Although they fell just 10 points shy of winning their fourth consecutive District 2 Class AA title, Lehman, under the direction of Williams and co-coach Phil Lipsky, won three individual titles and will advance six wrestlers to this

week's regional championships in Williamsport.

The Mountaineers, under the guidance of Kaschenbach, finished a more-than-respectable fifth in the 11-team tourney, grabbed one individual championship and will send four grapplers to regionals.

Rick Finnegan (103), Tim Sayre (119) and Burt Morgan (135) each captured district titles for the Black Knights, with Finnegan and Sayre repeating as district champs. Jason McDade (125), Mike Stuart (130) and Mike Pitcavage were each district runners-up.

Mike Vavrek (130) captured Dallas's lone district title after the Mountaineers sent four wrestlers to the finals. Vavrek decided

Lehman's Stuart, 3-1, in an exciting bout. Rick Hodle (103), Glenn Ellsworth (140) and Aaron Gingo (152) each captured second place honors and will advance to regionals.

"I think that if you told us back in December, after our match with Benton, that we would come within ten points of winning a district team title and send six wrestlers to regionals, I never would have believed it," said Williams, whose Knights lost the team title to Meyers, 170.5-160. "I thought that we wrestled pretty well. We really didn't lose any matches that we should have won. I thought the tournament was tougher than last year with the addition of Crestwood and Wyoming Area. Overall, I thought we

had a pretty good tournament."

For Kaschenbach and the Mounts, the impressive district showing was just an indication of how far the program has come over the past 12 months.

"These kids did a super job, beyond my expectations," said Kaschenbach. "I thought we had a chance to send four or five kids down to regionals but the entire team wrestled well. Once we knew that the (Wyoming Valley Conference) West division title was out of reach, we started looking forward to districts. One of the unique aspects of wrestling is that you can focus individually and perform well, no matter how the team does. I thought our kids wrestled very well."

Knights battle for District 2 title

By DAVE KONOPKI Sports Correspondent

It should come as a surprise to no one that the Lake-Lehman Black Knights and the Nanticoke Area Trojans will square off in a District 2 Class AAA semi-final game in boys' high school basketball.

The Black Knights entered the season as the favorite in the Wyoming Valley Conference Division II. They didn't disappoint, winning the division title and then advancing to District 2's version of the Final Four with a confidence-building, 65-53 come-from-behind win over Honesdale last week.

And when the month of March rolls around you can expect the Trojans to be playing their best basketball of the season. The consummate playoff contenders, the Trojans grabbed the WVC's fifth-seed with a win over Meyers in a special playoff game and then blew out the Lackawanna League's number one seed, Wallenpaupack, 74-56, to advance to the semifinals.

Lehman, 21-5, and Nanticoke, 18-8, will play in the nightcap of a doubleheader on Wednesday night

at Wilkes University. Tip-off is set for 8 p.m. In the opener at 6:30, Bishop Hoban, which eliminated Dallas from the playoffs, will battle Berwick.

The two winners will meet for the district championship and advance to the state playoffs. The losers will square off for the district's number three seed in the state tourney. The championship game and the consolation game will take place on Friday, March 12 at a site to be determined.

Lehman and Nanticoke know each other well, having scouted each other on numerous occasions during the season and having faced each other in an exhibition contest in early December. Nanticoke won that battle, 61-60, and the game was just as close as the final score would indicate.

"We had a chance to win the game with the last shot," said Lehman head coach Rodger Bearde, of the two team's first encounter. "We gave up some big plays and (Nanticoke guard John) Beggs hit a couple of big three-pointers. But we learned a lot from that game. We thought we had a pretty good team going into the game and I think the loss made us more focused."

While the Trojans played a lot of zone defense against the majority of their opponents, there's no question they will use a pressure defense against the Black Knights.

"Nanticoke has five guys who come after you," said Bearde of the Trojans, who averaged 67.1 points on offense and yielded 67.5 points per game on defense during the regular season. "They pressured us with a man-to-man defense the first time but everytime we scouted them, they played zone."

"They'll probably pressure us because we don't match up well guard to guard," added Bearde. "But they don't have much size and our big guys can handle the ball and play on the perimeter."

Trojan head coach Jim Carey has nothing but respect for the Black Knights. "They have a very, very good basketball team," said Carey. "They are very well coached. Nobody outcoaches Roger Bearde. Their three big guys (Rich Davis, Dave Clancy and Jesse Martin) can all hit the outside shot and drive to the basket. We'll have to outthrust them, get good position on the boards and not allow them any second shots."

The Trojans are led by Beggs (18.8 ppg) who plays much taller than his 5-3 frame. The senior guard hit 43 three-pointers during the regular season. Senior guard Jim Domzalski (5-10, 11.6) and senior forward Mike Oresick (6-2, 11.6) are arguably two of the best all-around athletes.

Senior forward Greg Baron (6-2, 13.9) and junior center Steve Ohm (6-3, 7.5) round out the starting five. Junior forward Dan Wempa (6-1, 3.8) has given Carey valuable minutes off the bench as a sixth-man.

Senior forward Rich Davis (6-5, 18.8) leads the Black Knights. Senior forward Jesse Martin (6-4, 15.1) and senior center Dave Clancy (6-6, 10.5) each have the ability to light up the scoreboard. Senior Chris Ziomek (5-10, 2.8) and junior Wil Woronko (5-11, 8.0) handle the backcourt duties. Junior Dave Fosko (5-11, 4.0) and sophomore Tim Wasilik (5-11, 2.4) have given Bearde quality minutes off the bench and have shown the ability to score. Fosko came off the bench to score 10 points against Honesdale and Wasilik nailed a key jumper seconds before halftime to ignite the Black Knight comeback.

Burd will play at Bloomsburg

By DAVE KONOPKI Sports Correspondent

From the first time he put on the shoulder pads and helmet at the tender age of nine, Brian Burd dreamed of someday playing college football.

Nearly 10 years and hundreds of hours of hard work later, that dream has come true.

The rugged 6-0, 182-pound son of Ray and Linda Burd of Wyoming recently accepted a partial scholarship to play football at Division II Bloomsburg University. The Dallas High School senior rushed for more than 3,500 career yards for the Mountaineers in three seasons, including 1,632 rushing yards and 17 touchdowns this season.

"I was very impressed with the Bloomsburg program," said Burd, who will join first-year head coach Dan Hale in the Huskie program. "They are really dedicated to rebuild a winning program. I want

to be a part of the rebuilding process."

The likeable 18-year-old, who was named to the Associated Press Pennsylvania Small School All-State Second Team, excels in the classroom as well as the gridiron, narrowing his final two choices to BU and Lehigh University.

"They (Lehigh) offered me a pretty good scholarship," said Burd, of the Ivy League school. "But Bloom offered me a better package. Clarion and Shippensburg University also recruited me pretty heavily. But I chose Bloomsburg because of their commitment to winning and because it's a lot closer. Now my family and friends can come and watch me play."

Players like Burd, with a unique combination of athletic ability and academic excellence, don't come around very often. Nobody knows that more than Burd's high school coach, Ted Jackson. "Brian is a super, super kid."

said Jackson, who guided the Mounts to a berth in the Eastern Conference final last season. "He was a dominating high school player for three years. He was our go-to guy. He carried the ball 30 times a game, caught passes and blocked for the quarterback. I can't say enough about what he meant to the Dallas program."

Jackson added that Burd's accomplishments on the football field are far from over.

"Brian can definitely play football on the Division II level," added Jackson. "His speed is pretty good and he is a very durable back. He played a lot of times with pain but still carried the ball 30 times a game. He might not have break-away speed, but he makes up for that in strength and desire."

Burd, who scored more than 1,000 on his SAT's, knows that earning a spot on the starting unit won't come easy. But he won't back down from the challenge.

"I'm going to work very hard for



BRIAN BURD

Shown in action last season

a spot," said Burd, who was recruited to play tailback and fullback. "You're not going to earn a spot by standing around and doing nothing. I've been lifting weights and I'll continue to lift. The coaches down there want me to get my weight up to about 195. I'm excited. I like the challenge."

Youth basketball crowns team, individual champs

By DAVE KONOPKI Sports Correspondent

The Dallas Youth Basketball organization recently completed another successful season with the crowning of team championships and individual honors in skill competition.

In the NBA (7th and 8th grade boys) finals, Justin Jumper scored 31 points to lead the Celtics over the Bulls, 41-33. Members of the team included Erik Janick, Matt Mertz, Larry Lettie, Mike Sabol, John Saba, Brian Bayer and Bobby Duris.

Members of the Bulls are: Billy Puchalsky, Kevin Kozel, Kevin Williams, Joe Tarity, Chuck Fehlinger, Kyle Droppers, Jeff Faneck and Brian Beretski.

In the Big East (5th and 6th grade boys), Pittsburgh defeated Boston College for the title. Members of the team are Bruce

Kunkle, Eric George, Mike Cleary, John Kertesz, Jeff Parish, Gene Koshinsky and Matt Kertesz.

Members of Boston College are: Mike Regan, Mike Bayer, John Kanaar, John Saba, Russ McDonald, Aaron Pietraccini, Rich Semanas, and Duane Sprau.

In the ACC (3rd and 4th grade boys) title contest, Florida State downed Duke. Members of Florida State include Mike Domzalski, Matt Eyt, Chris Hiester, Kevin Piekara, Jon Schneider, Seth Yeager, Joshua Rice and John Lukasavage.

Members of Duke include: T.C. Harding, Dan Fetko, Pat Barnard, Blake Saba, Kevin Callahan, Richard Kapson, Jonathan Lorah and Lee Stevens.

In girls' action, the Celtics captured the title by defeating the Bulls in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade league. Team members are: Jamie Simms, Jessie Tarity, Misty

Cook, Heather McCarthy, Chrystal Heffner, Nicole Makara, Sarah Nicole and Stacey Amann.

Members of the Bulls are: Denise Kovaleski, April Traver, Sarah Armand, Puja Taliv, Jamie Organic, Andrea Butler and Jennifer Granda.

In 6th, 7th, and 8th grade action, the Lakers downed the Jazz to win the title. Members of the Lakers are: Heather Witt, Danielle Shaubberger, Gwen Landon, Jennifer Geiger, Erika Turner and Candy Smith.

Members of the Jazz include: Nicole Nackley, Jeannie Dreier, Allison Ash, Heather Fuller, Kristin Race and Kendel Santarelli.

In the individual competition: Boys grades 3-4: LAY-UP: first place, Keith Sprau; second place, Danny Fetko. FOUL SHOOTING: first place, Buddy Shah; second

place, Herbie Bressler. Boys grades 5-6: LAY-UP: first place, Jason Smith; second place, Mike Regan. FOUL SHOOTING: first place, Matt Wycallis; second place, Kyle Droppers.

Boys grades 6-7: FOUL SHOOTING: first place, Justin Jumper; second place, Kevin West; 3-POINT SHOOTING: first place, Justin Jumper; second place, Bruce Kunkle.

Girls grades 3, 4, 5: FOUL SHOOTING: first place, Misty Cook; second place, Sarah Armand. LAY-UP: first place, Jessie Tarity; second place, Denise Kovaleski.

Girls grades 6, 7, 8: FOUL SHOOTING: first place, Nicole Nackley; second place, Segan Millington. LAY-UP: first place, Sarah Barlow.